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Thesis

WILLIAM SAROYAN, AN AMERICAN INTERPRETER OF OUR TIMES, AS SEEN IN HIS SHORT STORIES AND DRAMAS

by

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. William Saroyan, the most prolific and uneven of writers, has published eight volumes of short stories and three plays since 1936, and has made himself the most widely sneered at young writer of our day. He is our own "white-haired" boy and there has probably been no one like him since Byron who has so persistently cultivated the art of admiring in public his own brilliance.

In the autobiographical grand style, Mr. Saroyan, under the guise of writing short stories, lets us know what he thinks of everything. For him there is a story in everything, for the simple reason that if no other point emerges it is at least clear that life is strange and wonderful. He seems to be astounded, delighted, and agonized by the mystery of his own breathing. He concocts one story after another without adherence to any one style. But in all his many styles he has that litheness and life that suggest perpetual motion. By instinct he is a philosopher of the flux, an anti-intellectual who refuses to believe in fixed principles. Yet, he is forever perversely striving to find some order in the universe. He says in Inhale and Exhale, "Life is art arranged." Nevertheless, his curious psychology has not induced him to seek a disciplined order within himself. He has his own way of saying things and looking at things. He is little indebted to others for his ideas.

Like Thomas Wolfe, he writes about himself, but in more of a Whitman-esque vein. He is called a short story writer mostly because his stories are written in prose. Most of his stories are poetic shouts, no less lyrical for being written in street language with many slang words

swelling the chorus of a "Song of Myself." It might have been Mr. Saroyan who wrote:

"I too am not a bit tamed, I am too untranslatable
I sound my bargain yawp over the roofs of the world."

Whitman billed himself as a poet, but he wrote things that were not recognizably, not receivably poetry. He broke all literary club rules about making a scene in the reading room, and he would insist on shouting about himself at the top of his lungs. He had very bad taste, very little sense of form. He used words and ideas that were much too big for him. He ranted on like a drunken actor, not caring if he made a fool of himself or not. A great deal of Whitman's writing was promissory, a great deal sheer brag. The professors have now mummified him into a great literary figure. He was better than that. He could hardly write his own name in their language, but he made his mark.

Mr. Saroyan has those precious gifts also; a love of human beings, a rich imagination, a gusto, an optimism, a gayety and an unwillingness to be put into a conventional straight-jacket of any political or social theory. His realism is only the basis for something finer and more artistically important; perhaps it can be called a romantic-realism. His characters are almost those of an American Dickens. They have reality, but an intensified reality. They live according to their own laws of truth, but they do live.

Although Mr. Saroyan's vitality, abundance and spontaneity are like the shadow of a great rock in the weary land of commonplace, this very vitality, abundance and spontaneity have their dangers unless they are controlled by a sense of balance, of intellectual values of form.

In some of his stories we get a different Saroyan, stories that have

a living texture of memory. He takes us back into his boyhood and youth. He seems to say outwardly and honestly without his old self-consciousness, "There it is as it was; you can share it with me if you wish, and draw your own conclusions." Mr. Saroyan might be hampered by the cult of realism that seems to degrade so much of our fiction today. In these stories he goes back to his childhood, where his sense of reality was certain. In an age of chaos and doubt he has been driven back to the security of his childhood memories. These stories are humorous with a rather wistful humor of a man looking back on a boy's deep seriousness. Beneath all the escapades there is an undertone which can be called biblical.

There is a third type of story in which Mr. Saroyan shows an awareness of the vast inarticulate striving of humanity toward something called civilization. This awareness has made him more sober and less inclined toward experimentation and exhibitionism, a little less sure of himself, and a little depressed by the clamor that bigotry now raises throughout the world. He shows in these stories a certain understanding and acceptance of the pathetic devices whereby people shield their vulnerability, and also a comprehension that there is always a longing in people to escape to a better world, even against great odds, and to fulfill their ideals in a fine way. There is expressed in these stories a general note of simple tolerance, political, class and racial, and a comprehension, combined with a sharp ridicule of the slogans of bigots and militant partisans. His humor in these stories is a compound of sorrow and bitterness, of satire and fantasy.

In this thesis it is my purpose to delve into the stories of William Saroyan demonstrating his Whitman-esque vivacious abundance; his wistful humor; his awareness of the vast striving of humanity toward civilization

and other points I have projected in the foregoing paragraphs. It is my thesis that William Saroyan has a message. The authenticity of this is perhaps still to be decided long after these sentences are completed. I believe as the time goes on he will have a wider and wider acceptance and that he will become one of the vital forces shaping our time.

In his plays Mr. Saroyan has struck a new and noteworthy originality of life, force, freshness and humor. Sometimes in their very lack of dramaturgic discipline and in their airy rejection of the true dramatic formulae lie their paradoxical strength and vigor. His dramas are modern, arty, experimental. They are packed with symbolism, laughter and typical Saroyan autobiographical touches of futility as found in his short stories. Also he is violently anti-intellectual.

Impatient writing and absence of form can often invalidate his plays. Mr. Saroyan can turn loose the full current of his fantasy, imagination, riotous tumult, laughter and disdain, his loving double-edged folk observations and lose it all in a full stream because of little regulation and lack of final form, because he has not worked hard enough or thought enough about it. But usually we have to forgive his lack of form and plot because of the poignant beauty, high quality imagination and ever warming tenderness that predominate over all else.

Toward the human race Mr. Saroyan has the best intentions. Out of a warm heart and lively fancy he writes paeans to the essential goodness in life and people. His simple studies of really simple people have in them the gleam of imagination and intuitive wisdom that flecks Mr. Saroyan's prose with poetry. All his characters are their author in disguise, for

the simple reason that they read his temperament to be as fantastically themselves as he wants everybody to be.

Mr. Saroyan's characters are warm and human. They know that this is not the best of all possible worlds, and therefore their hearts are filled with tenderness and pity, but they also know they are incapable of making crooked things straight except through kindness and understanding of each-other's troubles. He is a poet of little people, and he sees the beauty in their souls and lives. He writes with his heart rather than with his brain, and despite what he has uttered publicly when he has discussed his work, his work itself has a humbleness of approach which is disarming. It is this, with his imaginative fancy, which makes Mr. Saroyan unique among American writers for the theatre. He may believe in himself, but he knows he has not found the key to the mystery of life. He asks that people treat one another in a simple wholesome way. He has at present no sense of form, and this is his weakness and his strength. It is his weakness because it prevents a final compression of power; it is his strength because it permits him liberties which are fascinating and often delightful.

It is always the fate of the new or the relatively new form in any artistic direction to meet with critical skepticism. The "slings and arrows" that Mr. Saroyan has suffered and doubtless for a while will suffer have been suffered similarly by other experimentalists in the past.

In this thesis it is my plan to show, by delving into the plays of William Saroyan, his originality, freshness, and vigor even in his lack of dramaturgic form; his warm human attitude toward the human race, and the various other ideas revealed in the preceding paragraphs. William Saroyan

is still a youngster who has far to go and a great deal to learn, but I contend that there is already in him the flint from which great drama is brilliantly sparkled.

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

William Saroyan was born in the Fresno Vineyard district of California in the year 1908. His father was an ~~ARMENIAN~~ immigrant who had been a minister and teacher, educated by the Presbyterian missionaries, and an unpublished writer in his native country.[1] He came to America in 1905. For a time he was a janitor in New York City, but later had a church in Patterson, New Jersey. He tried his luck at grape farming in California, but he was a saintly person with a poet's soul and not the type for business. His brother finally sold the farm for him. William Saroyan's father died when William was a small boy.

The father's death left the family with little money. The mother was forced to leave her children in an orphanage and take a job as maid in San Francisco. Saroyan recalls that the orphanage was a pleasant enough place that was run by Irish people.

When William was seven, his mother began working in a cannery in Fresno and the children left the orphanage to join her. They lived in the Armenian section in Fresno, the biggest such settlement outside of Armenia. Here Saroyan attended a grammar school and later he went to the Fresno Junior High School.

His first job was selling newspapers after school. He was only fifteen when he quit the Fresno Junior High School, but he continued his education by himself in the public libraries. His next job was as a messenger boy for Postal Telegraph.[2] He rode a bicycle from four until midnight,

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[1] William H. Bernie, "Daring Young Man," American, July 1940

[2] Geoffrey T. Hellman, "The Great Saroyan," Life, November 18, 1940

delivering and picking up telegrams. Soon after he left this job he read law in his uncle's office, where he also learned typing and shorthand. But this gave him no income, so he left the office to work in the vineyards beside the Japanese and Mexicans, who he thought were simple and good people. Saroyan worked at many things after this. He worked in a warehouse, cemetery, vegetable stand, hardware store and numerous other places. After he failed to get a job as reporter to a San Francisco paper, he joined the National Guard. He was put out when he frankly confessed that he joined only because he was hungry.

Saroyan began writing in his teens as Sirak Goryan. He made his debut in 1933 with a story called "The Broken Wheel," a short story reminiscent of his own boyhood. It appeared in the Hairenek, an Armenian daily published in Boston. The story was printed by E. J. O'Brien in Best Stories of 1934.[1] Later it appeared in Saroyan's second volume of short stories, Inhale and Exhale. In the winter of 1934 the editor of Story published "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze," a curious subjective study of a destitute writer. Story Magazine felt the thrill of discovery in this story. Their reward for their encouragement was an avalanche of short stories by the same author. Twenty-six of these stories that appeared in Story, American Mercury and other magazines were gathered into Saroyan's first book in 1934, The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories.

The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze and Other Stories went through several editions. The first printing became a collector's item.

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[1] Biographical Sketch, Wilson Bulletin, May 1936

From the profits of his first successful literary venture Mr. Saroyan came East again and took a trip to Armenia and on to Russia. He took travel notes and the impressions found their way into his second book of short stories, Inhale and Exhale, which appeared in February 1936. A third volume, Three Times Three, was brought out later that year by a small publishing house on the coast. Little Children, a fourth collection of stories, was published by Harcourt, Brace in the fall of 1937, and was generally received by the critics as his best work at that time, and in November 1938, The Trouble With Tigers. Modern Age brought out a volume entitled Love Here Is My Heart, in the spring of 1938, and another called Peace, It's Wonderful, soon after. In the fall of 1938 the Archtype Press, a small West Coast publishing house, issued a limited edition of four hundred and fifty copies of A Native American, which has reappeared this fall by Harcourt, Brace under a new title, My Name Is Aram, with a few added stories. All of Mr. Saroyan's books have been published in England by Faber and Faber, and a number of his short stories have been translated into foreign languages. "My Heart's in the Highlands," produced in New York City by the Group Theatre in April 1939, was Mr. Saroyan's first play. Within thirteen months two more plays were produced on Broadway: "The Time of Your Life" and "Love's Old Sweet Song." The second play, "The Time of Your Life," was awarded the Pulitzer Prize last spring for the year 1939. Mr. Saroyan refused the thousand dollar award on the grounds that he did not feel that wealth should patronize art.

William Saroyan is considered the strangest and most versatile of our modern writers. He unbelievably, in quick consecution, comes out with

plays, stories, essays, ballets and radio scripts. He has now five new plays that he is getting ready for production and publication. Four of them: "Sweeney in the Tree," "The Hero of the World," "Something About a Soldier," and "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning," have either been read by the critics or tried out in the summer theatres last summer. The fifth, as this is being written, has not yet been finished.

Mr. Saroyan, who is fresh out of his twenties, looks, dresses, and frequently talks like a composite picture of every hard-boiled news reporter you have ever seen in the movies. He is six feet tall, has regular features dominated by a determined chin. He is more sociable in less pretentious circles. He is known and welcome in every honky-tonk along the water front in San Francisco. He feels at home with bell boys, waiters and bit-players.

CHAPTER II

PREFACE TO THE SHORT STORIES

Since more short stories are published in America than in any other country, a general effect of the American short story on the reader is to confirm its presumed vitality. America can be seen through its short story in the movement from the European tradition in Hawthorne and Bret Harte, through Stephen Crane and O. Henry to the pure and hard American product of Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner and William Saroyan. The short story in America is now thrusting here and there, seeking new food, taking new forms and shedding them when they do not serve. But all the time it is curiously awake, reflecting ardently and truly the thousand facets of the American scene and spirit.

Technically, Mr. Saroyan's short stories often illustrate the extremity of disintegration. Many of them are hardly more than passages from the author's diary. Stylistically, Mr. Saroyan's ideal and frequent achievement is the complete avoidance of formal literary language. Despite a great deal of ineffective and pointless rambling, Mr. Saroyan's work has a "refreshing and individual note ..... if the ultimate interest in a work of art is the personality that creates, Mr. Saroyan ranks fairly high among contemporary writers, not merely in his arrogance and conscious posturing, but in his disarmingly honest presentation of himself, richness of feeling, sympathy for the despised and rejected, concern for the universally human, and hostility to the essentially inhuman." [1] For in a field where there is not enough talent to go around, "A man with the talent of Mr. Saroyan must be implored not to squander it, not to turn it to

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[1] Fred B. Millet, Contemporary American Authors, Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1940

flatulence and confusion." [1] He has"a persuasive sense of life to which the reader responds with some part of his own experience." [2]

In a direct statement of his technique and art in the short story, Mr. Saroyan writes: "My personal theory about literature and everything is this--that the only thing that matters is the man himself. In my opinion he ought to be one who knows as much as the next man about everything. I am not a hard worker. The mere thought of working irritates me. I have no regular hours. I do not follow a program. I write only when I feel like writing, and when I feel like writing, I write swiftly, easily, and without any of the agony which is supposed to accompany the activity of writing. I write each of my short stories in from one to three hours. Once in a while I spend four or five hours on a story. If a story is not right I throw it in the closet and write another. I have enough notes and ideas to keep reasonably busy for the rest of my life, if I live to be one hundred and seventeen years of ago. In addition to these notes and ideas, new notes and ideas come up every day. If I feel like writing I can write anywhere. I never use a dictionary. I know nothing about formal grammar and punctuation. I have a system of grammar and punctuation all my own. The basis of this system is to be lucid and to put down one idea at a time."

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[1] Louis Kronenberger, "But Don't Pause for Breath," The Nation, March 20, 1936

[2] Edward J. O'Brien, Introduction, Best Stories of 1937 Dodd, Mead and Company, New York

THE DARING YOUNG MAN ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE

In his first volume of short stories that burst upon the literary scene in 1934, Mr. Saroyan reveals a genuine gift for writing and a genuine feeling for life in the stories, "Seventy Thousand Assyrians," "Myself Upon the Earth," and "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze." The last, which was first published by Story in January 1934 and won the O. Henry Memorial Award for the best short story of that year, is a unique, perfectly timid, and particularly refreshing piece. It was at the time when the country had just gone through three years of the depression and the new and uninspired proletarian novels were flooding the market place that Mr. Saroyan appeared with an unrestrained and beautifully articulated story of a jobless young man, victim of the depression, who starved to death in a San Francisco rooming house. On the table beside him was a shining penny that he had picked up, later taken home and brightly polished.

> "Without reading them he looked at the words, 'E Pluribus Unum One Cent United States of America,' and turning the penny over, he saw Lincoln and the words, 'In God We Trust Liberty 1923.' "

Also near him were some sheets of Y. M. C. A. paper on which he had begun to pen his "Application for Permission to Live." The story utilizes in an individual manner the Laurence Sterne and James Joyce techniques for exploring the subconscious in "Sleep," a chapter heading of the piece.

> "This earth, the face of one who lived, the form without the weight, weeping upon snow, white music, the magnified flower twice the size of the universe, black clouds, the caged panther staring-- O swift moment of life. It is ended, the earth is again now."

In "Wakefulness," another chapter heading, after a few sentences, the author gets into straight prose and tells his story. The piece shows the tragic surrender of the young man, crazed and sick with hunger. It speaks with great poignancy and understanding of the dreams and sufferings of the impoverished young people in the 1930's. The story uses the circus symbol of the flying trapeze with exactly the right degree of irony, repeats it twice most artistically to enlarge the implications and to point the climax.

> "Helplessly his mind sang, 'He flies through the air with the greatest of ease; the daring young man on the flying trapeze;' then laughed with all the might of his being--
>
> "'Through the air on the flying trapeze', his mind hummed. Amusing it was, astoundingly funny. A trapeze to God, or to nothing, a flying trapeze to some sort of eternity; he prayed objectively for strength to make the flight with grace--
>
> "Then swiftly, neatly, with the grace of the young man on the trapeze, he was gone from his body..... The earth circled away, and knowing that he did so, he turned his lost face to the empty sky and became dreamless, unalive, perfect."

Mr. Saroyan's best work is in this more serious vein--when he writes about the dreams that disturb lonely young men in furnished rooms. He knows from first-hand personal experiences, as well as from observation, what it is like to be without money for a hamburger and coffee, or a week's rent in a dingy room. In "Aspirin is a Member of the N. R. A.," another piece in this volume, he says, "You hear a lot of sad talk about all the young men who died in the Great War. Well, what about this war? Is it less real because it destroys with less violence, with a more sustained pain?"

As indicated in the Introduction of this book, it is demonstrated here that Mr. Saroyan has his own way of saying things, of looking at things, and that he is little indebted to others for his ideas.

In some stories Mr. Saroyan puts into poetry random phrases remembered in "dives" and "booking joints." He listens to the talk of other young men waiting for national recovery and perhaps projecting himself into the surroundings for which he longs. The young man will perhaps create a house with a yard, trees, flowers, a lovely girl at the door, and a fine job that will make a millionaire of him. For a brief moment it is all intensely real. In one especially good story entitled, "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8," this longing for a sympathetic girl and romance gets itself identified with the haunting counterpoint of a cheap jazz record which the boy plays over and over on his phonograph. The eight swift chords beat on in his head with unaccountable persistence until they come to signify the approval of the same lonely desire of the girl at the other end of the teletype machine. Then, one sad day, the music and the girl, but not the longing, went away; so also, in Saroyan restlessness, did the boy,

> "Walking from the waiting room of the depot to the train, I could feel the music tearing out my heart, and when the train began to get under way and when the whistle screamed, I was sitting helplessly weeping for this girl and the house, and sneering at myself for wanting more of life than there was in life to have."

Here we get a proof of Mr. Saroyan's realism, a romantic realism that is only the basis for something finer and more artistically important. This was pointed out earlier in the Introduction to this book.

In his perceptive Whitman-esque piece called "Myself Upon the Earth," are seen those poetic shouts that are no less lyrical for being written in the everyday language of the street. Here in the autobiographical grand style one learns about the man and understands his tormented searchings and sardonic commentaries on "what it is to be alive" which he says "is the only thing that interests me greatly." [1]

> "I do not want to be clever. I am horribly afraid of this. I have never been clever in my life, and now that I have come to a labor even more magnificent than living itself, I do not want to utter a single false word. For months I have been telling myself, 'You must be humble. Above all things, you must be humble.' I am determined not to lose my character.
>
> "I am a story teller, and I have but a single story, Man. I want to tell this simple story in my own way, forgetting the rules of rhetoric, the tricks of composition. I am not a writer at all. I write because there is nothing more civilized or decent for me to do."

To many this statement no doubt carries its own charming contradiction to already conceived opinions about William Saroyan, the man with his picture in the paper, the man who is forever shouting about himself, boasting, the man who facetiously wrote the boisterously clever preface to this collection of stories:

> "I immediately began to study all the classic rules, including Ring Lardner's, and in the end I discovered that the rules were all wrong--so I wrote some new rules.

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[1] "Seventy Thousand Assyrians," The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze

> "I wrote Number One when I was eleven and had just been sent home from the fourth grade for having talked out of turn and meant it. 'Do not pay any attention to rules other people make,' I wrote. 'They make them for their own protection, and to hell with them.' (I was pretty sore that day.)
>
> "My third rule was: Learn to typewrite so you can turn out stories as fast as Zane Grey. It is one of my best rules."

Mr. Saroyan does not want to be clever. There is a humbleness in his approach (mentioned in the Introduction) which is disarming, and this humbleness overpowers all the extroverted cleverness that he puts on. No writer could get by successfully without a great deal besides a very high opinion of himself and "wind" with which to blow it about. Mr. Saroyan is a firm believer that "a flexible person can accomplish anything the circumstances demand of him." Once he was asked by a young man, "Aren't you about the world's most successful extrovert?" He grinned. "No," he answered, I'm just an introvert with enough sense to play extrovert." [1]

"Seventy Thousand Assyrians" is a Shandy-esque performance in which Saroyan sounds the same message heard in "Myself Upon the Earth," declares his love for the human race and his desire to write about "man."

> "I want to speak a more universal language, the heart of man, the unwritten part of man, that which is eternal and common to all races."

In this story, while pretending to do one thing, Saroyan actually does another. However, like Laurence Sterne's, his digressions make his story and are a success, and a success need never apologize for itself. He

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[1] William H. Bernie, American, July 1940

digresses from talking about haircuts and literature to finally expressing his ideal of upholding the dignity of the race, the brotherhood of man alive.

> "I am thinking of seventy thousand Assyrians, one at a time, alive, a great race. I am thinking of Theodore Boudal, himself seventy million Assyrians, himself Assyria, and man, standing in a barber shop in San Francisco in 1933, and being, still, himself, the whole race."

"A Cold Day" is another story in which Saroyan's humbleness of approach revealed in the Introduction is demonstrated. This is one of those autobiographical, characteristically revealing pieces in which Mr. Saroyan reminds himself,

> "Do not deceive. Do not make up lies for the sake of pleasing anyone..... Simply relate what is the great event of all history, of all time, the humble, artless truth of mere living..... The man you write of need not perform some heroic or monstrous deed in order to make your prose great. Let him do what he has always done, day in and day out, continuing to live. Let him walk and talk and think and sleep and dream and awaken, and walk again and talk again and move and be alive. It is enough. There is nothing else to write about. You have never seen a short story in your life. Your own consciousness is the only form you need. Your own awareness is the only action you need."

This is a noble purpose with which no one could quarrel. It is not at all surprising that Mr. Saroyan sometimes fails to tell a story, to arrive at a definite point, or that he sometimes contents himself by staying at home entirely and talking about getting ready to start. When he finds it difficult to start, he talks about his room, his typewriter, his cousin, his uncle, or Ezra Pound, or his contempt for the phony and the trickster whom he can spot with uncommon accuracy in life or in the movies.

He is ill content when he is not writing. While other writers would go into meditation to clarify and arrange their materials and wait for something to say, Mr. Saroyan sits at his typewriter and writes about sitting at his typewriter without anything to say. When he runs down, he goes right on: "I don't feel like writing any more. How can anybody begin to mention everything." He ends "Myself Upon the Earth" with these words:

> "Day after day I had this longing for my typewriter. This is the whole story. I don't suppose this is a very artful ending, but it is the ending just the same. The point is this: day after day I longed for my typewriter. This morning I got it back. It is before me now and I am tapping at it, and this is what I have written."

In like manner, Mr. Saroyan, who is sometimes weak in invention but strong in perception, often does not construct his story. He merely blueprints it, puts up a scaffold, and makes us wait for the finished structure. This accounts for the instances of gross indulgences found in pieces such as "A Curved Line," "Love, Death, Sacrifice and So Forth," "Three Stories," and "Dear Greta Garbo." Mr. Saroyan makes up for these in stories like "Harry," a truly fine character study of a legendary world beater, money maker that he had heard stories about since he was a child; "The Man With the French Post Cards," another character study of a dignified Russian who was now destitute but kept his self-respect; and "Fight Your Own War," an interesting story of a young writer who refuses to take part in a second world war, refuses to be regimented into army. In these stories Saroyan has handled form, plot, and material with skill and straightforwardness and has either held his personality in check or shaped it toward a sound end.

The inconsequential ramblings seen in "A Curved Line," "Love, Death,

Sacrifice and So Forth," "Three Stories," and "Dear Greta Garbo" make it difficult for a reader to give the good things in the book their due. It is a critical weakness of Mr. Saroyan which urges him to reprint some of his incredibly trivial pieces instead of allowing them to be generously forgotten in ephemeral magazine issues. But these irritations must not be permitted to obscure the fairly substantial number of rare and individual stories of this gifted writer.

INHALE AND EXHALE

There are seventy-one stories in Inhale and Exhale, and again we have a volume of such startling unevenness that one can support or deny any thesis by its text. The subjects in this collection range from reminiscences of Saroyan's boyhood to speculative statements on the Saroyan universe. But whether the scene is a barber shop, vaudeville, honky-tonk, back street or California valley, Mr. Saroyan's brooding eye sees more in it than would meet an ordinary fact-finding glance. This huge output, good, bad and indifferent, is at least a token of tremendous vitality. Mr. Saroyan talks with complete unrestraint, freely and abundantly.

In the stories themselves one can trace the exact line marking off experience from fantasy. In many stories dealing with his boyhood, he is rich and suggestive. As it was probably intended, these stories in the volume shape together in a loose biography. Any youthful impression, any recollected moment of suffering is enough to set him off. In the story "Five Ripe Pears" he tells about himself when a small boy, learning the laws of private property by stealing five pears. He brought the pears to school because they were beautiful and he wanted others to see them as he did. Of course he was misunderstood and punished for stealing the pears, but somehow he could not adequately explain his feelings.

> "A tragic misfortune of youth is that it is speechless when it has most to say, and a sadness of maturity is that it is garrulous when it has forgotten where to begin and what language to use. Oh, we have been well educated in error, all right. We at least know that we have forgotten."

In "The War" he tells us the meaning and effect the first World War had on his neighborhood gang. They cowardly attacked another boy because he was a German and they were supposed to hate the Germans.

> "I began to cry when Herman began to cry. It was because of these things that were in us, these rotten things, slapping a boy and tripping him, knocking him down and striking him, sinking a ship and destroying a village, shooting men. I cried like a fool baby, and my brother Trekar's lips trembled and he bit his lips, and the boys brought blood from Herman's face, and it was the ugliest, the most cowardly thing I had ever seen."

"Death of Children" gives us pictures of the little people Saroyan knew as a boy in Emerson School. Rosa Tapin, a little Mexican girl, had no talent for learning arithmetic but she could sing "Juanita" so that everyone knew it was all right and proper for her not to know grammar and arithmetic.

> "She sang, not with her lungs and lips, but with the shape of herself that was visible and could only be sensed and sensed only by us who were living with her midway between the reality of sleep and the reality of wakefulness, and all of us felt that she certainly was not real, not merely one more little girl."

Then there was Alice Schwab, the teacher's favorite, who had the most impressive manners of anyone at the school. One day the teacher announced that Alice was dead.

> "Then all of us loved Alice and were shocked and felt sorrowful and wondered how it was that she of all people had not lived."

And the little, frightened Armenian refugee who had been through the hell of the invasion of the Turks on the Armenian people, had become the very

close friend of the young William Saroyan. A few years later Saroyan was told that the little Gourken was dead.

> "I could feel a form of my life turning inward with this boy to return to memory, and it was then that I stood without a brother and felt the living death in me."

One of the most humorous in this group of stories is "The Barber Whose Uncle Had His Head Bitten By a Circus Tiger." The boy here is reluctant to go to the barber shop for a haircut. Everyone tells him how badly he needs one. Finally when a bird starts to build its nest in his head of hair, he makes a visit to the barber shop. It proves to be quite a pleasantry because the barber is unusual and tells him about the world, brings him some coffee and spends the afternoon telling him stories, especially the one about his uncle who had his head bitten off by a circus tiger.

> "All I could think about for weeks was the barber's poor uncle Misah whose head was bitten off by a circus tiger, and I looked forward to the day when I would need a haircut again so I could go to Aram's shop and listen to his story of man on earth, lost and lonely and always in danger, the sad story of his poor uncle Misah. The sad story of every man alive.

In 1934, E. J. O'Brien printed "The Broken Wheel" in his collection of the best short stories of that year. This is the finest story in the collection--rich in humor and pathos. It tells of Saroyan's brother Krikor and the various other members of his family. When Krikor bought a cornet and everyone for blocks around knew that Krikor had a cornet--When Krikor bought himself a birthday cake for seven dollars and fifty

cents and the family had cake at every meal for a week.--When he bought a bicycle that was too big and had to trade it for a smaller one, and when he was riding his smaller brother on the cross bars the wheel broke and his mother could not refrain from laughing as she saw the incident from the window. In the midst of all the joviality comes news that Uncle Vahsu had been killed in France.

> "Then suddenly something strange happened; it happened inside of me, and at the same time it seemed to be happening all over the world.--I felt that I was part of life, that at last I knew how all things ended. A strange desolating sadness swept through the earth and it seemed that I had just become aware of the earth, of man on it, of life, of the beauty and the pain, the joy and the fear and the ugliness."

As indicated in the Introduction, these stories are Mr. Saroyan's simple declarations of "There it is as it was; you can share it with me if you wish, and draw your own conclusions." Here, as we will see later in "Little Children" and "My Name is Aram," more stories of the same "back to childhood" theme, is Mr. Saroyan at his best. He has drawn stories out of his childhood memories and impressions without the least effort or strain, and in every way these innocent and guileless stories show that happy feeling of frank lightness and ease.

A very commonly recurring theme in this volume is an attack on the moral concepts resulting from the ownership of property. Mr. Saroyan has a hatred for those whose lives are ruled by their possessions. His attitude, however, has nothing of the socialist in it. Sometimes he handles the theme humorously as in the story "Raisins" in which he tells

how a whole countryside devoted itself to the raisin-grape growing during the "Have you had your iron today?" period and then when the bottom dropped out of the market had itself to subsist on raisins.

> "And we learned to cook raisins. And they were good stewed and they had a fine taste with bread, and all over our valley we were eating raisins for food because we could not sell them. People could not buy raisins because they were a luxury and we had to eat raisins because they were a luxury."

But more often the same theme is treated with more passion and indignation as in "The Oranges," where the poor little fellow is made to stand on a street corner and force a smile on his tired face so he might sell a few oranges.

> "What's the use to have your muscles aching just because some people are rich and some people are poor, and the rich ones eat and laugh, and the poor ones don't eat and always fight and ask eachother to kill them?"

And the young composer from the streets in "Prelude to an American Symphony" is very bitter toward the big ladies and gentlemen of society that he has been forced onto by success. His mother was dead now, died before he could rescue her from poverty.

> "Maybe they killed her, but he was still alive. He was getting drunk enough to make them get things straight about him. He came from the street. He fought it out alone. Who in the hell did they think they were."

Certain other themes recur. Several stories deal with the terrified desire of lost souls to crawl back into the womb, stories about

gambling-- the plentiful. The best of these are "Two Days Wasted in Kansas City," "The Horses and the Sea," and "Little Miss Universe." These stories demonstrate very well the author's love of human beings and his great optimism and faith in their innate goodness that is mentioned in the Introduction. The first of these tells of a gambler's sudden uncanny luck in throwing dice because a strange girl enters who is in need of money so she may live the way she wants to--innocently and decently. The girl leaves and the gambler is unhappily left with only the money, her money.

> "While she was in the gambling joint we had the whole world and the whole universe and every idea of God on our side, and I wish to Christ she hadn't gone away and left me with only a lot of lousy money in my pocket, instead of the real rich winning I had made."

"The Horses and the Sea" concerns an Englishman who gives up the sea for gambling on horse races, but finally comes to his senses and goes back to the sea, back to the clean sea, the clean sky, and the simplicity of the day.

> "And you liked it even when it was dangerous because it was clean--even if the ship sank and everybody was drowned, it was all right because it was clean and the idea was a clean idea."

Though he waxes on without setting down a formal narrative in "Little Miss Universe," he gives us a realistic photograph of the three authorities on horses at the Kentucky Pool Room, Number One Opera Alley, in San Francisco. But here as in all these stories or pieces, Mr. Saroyan's realism is used for a foundation for something finer, something more artistically important. As projected in the Introduction, this may be termed

his romantic realism. It gives us an insight to his high moral sense of values and great faith in human beings, real humans who live intensely according to their own laws of truth, but they do live.

There is an excellent but small group of stories concerning the groping attempts of lonely souls to find solace in love. Here, as in the boyhood memory stories, we have combined with the vitality of real life, a greater sense of balance and intellectual form than is found in many of his autobiographical spouts.

"Secrets in Alexandria"[1]--about a lonely girl longing to be part of the desperation and bewilderment she sees in a young man who sits next to her in a movie.

> "Everything she had ever wanted that was decent and beautiful had never come to be and it was always like this; everybody lonely, no one able to touch another's life."

The story "The Mother" --the futile attempts of a lonely boy to give love and security to a girl who is illegitimately pregnant are so superb that one regrets Saroyan's usual avoidance of this theme.

These stories are proof of the author's striving to find some order in the universe, and shows he has his own way of looking at things and saying things, as was indicated in the Introduction.

> "She felt a fierce impulse to be alone with him, to have him love her with that desperation on his face. She wondered why such decent things had been made to seem vile and why so much fake importance had been attached to them--engagements, fake love talk, marriage licenses, church ceremonies, ritual, nonsense."

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[1] "Secrets in Alexandria," Inhale and Exhale

There is a small group of stories in which Mr. Saroyan dramatizes a little incident that a city editor might box as human interest stories. One of these, "Our Little Brown Brothers, the Filipinos," concerns a Filipino wrestler who refused to abide by the referee's decision and held the ring all night against half of the town's police force. Another, "A Night of Nothing," tells of strange happenings and thoughts at a dance marathon. Here again we get Mr. Saroyan's eternal striving to find order in a chaotic universe, striving of humanity toward civilization. This awareness, as pointed out in the Introduction, has made Mr. Saroyan more sober and less inclined toward experimentation and exhibitionism. He seems here a little less sure of himself and more or less depressed by the clamor that bigotry raises throughout the world.

> "It was simply that death had become an obsession, a compulsion, inescapable, the real prize, the only price worth walking for, the only compensation that could possibly satisfy them for the agony they were suffering from moment to moment.....all the going and coming, the waiting. I mean day after day trying to do something..... What the hell is it all about?"

Here, as well as in "Secrets in Alexandria," "The Mother," "Hunger Laughing," and "Panorama Unmerciful", as indicated in the Introduction, we get an understanding and acceptance of the pathetic devices whereby people shield or cover up their wounds; also an understanding that there is always a longing in people to do a different thing in a fine way. Expressed here is that simple note of tolerance mentioned before in the Introduction, and a humor that is a strange combination of satire and fantasy, of sorrow and bitterness.

We seldom get a simple story in the volume. A great part of the stories seem to be autobiographical, and because he writes about himself with this abundance and vitality and spontaneity, he might easily reply with Whitman, "I am large. I contain multitudes." [1] Sometimes we might be irritated by his intentionally and elaborately mixed metaphors, by his intoxication of his own ego in "The Gay and Melancholy Flux." But then again we are delighted when he delivers aphorisms of dubious truths and dubious importances such as:

> "Playing poker is a much better way to learn to be a wise man than taking a correspondence course." [2]

> "Steve knew nothing. He was a great philosopher." [3]

and when he hits a note that Hans Christian Anderson might have delivered, as in the story of the little whistle whose queer sound reminded the hearer of nothing.

> "In London I blew the whistle at the king's palace, and there will be no end of consequences." [4]

In these seventy-one stories it is evident that Mr. Saroyan has power, a permeating power which is typically American. Only a few of these pieces attempt to be stories. But whether they are fiction or descriptive sketches, most of them are declarations of Mr. Saroyan's perplexity with mankind and civilization. Although some are not perhaps worth preserving, when Mr. Saroyan is good he is distinctly good. Often, as in "Prelude to

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[1] "Song of Myself" Whitman
[2] "The Gay and Melancholy Flux" Inhale and Exhale
[3] "The Bridge" Inhale and Exhale
[4] "The Whistle" Inhale and Exhale

an American Symphony," "Raisins," and "The Oranges," the spectacle of injustice and stupidity makes him "so hot that his statement is lost in a fury of dishevelled sentences that still are good sentences although not such sentences as an academy of English would pass, but sentences that invigorate literature, sentences whirling and kicking with childhood energy." [1]

His method is not that of the artist using power, but of a man impelled by it. He does not approach his themes. He goes at them with great spontaneity and force. Sometimes the result is a gem-like creation, sometimes not. In this volume his gem-like creations come with the bursts of ectasy at the contemplation of the earth, the morning light, the color of oranges, the smell of rain, the taste of water, and the music of crowds.

> "He is on fire with life and ideas and words. He is a poet exercising his wonder and his hate in a sort of prose sonnet." [1]

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[1] "The Short Story in America," Thomas Burke
American Mercury, September 1936

CHAPTER III

THE LESSER WORKS

It is a critical weakness of Mr. Saroyan to reprint his lesser, trivial self-indulgences that should be allowed to rest in peace, generously forgotten in old magazine issues. But in mass-production plant style, he has slapped almost anything and everything that comes out of his typewriter in between the covers of a book. As a result of this we have three volumes of inferior short stories for the years 1937 and 1938 that make it difficult for a reader to give the better works their due credit.

The first of these is Three Times Three, brought out by a small West Coast publishing house in the fall of 1936. As in some of his pieces in the two previous volumes, Mr. Saroyan still gives free play to his tremendous vitality, concocting one story after another without revision, criticism or rejection. He prints stories which he himself knows to be failures, and then apologizes for them so brilliantly that his brazenness must be forgotten. He says in part in the introductory note to "Baby," one of the nine short stories in this book,

> "I tried too much for this one. Here and there it is all right, it is fine, it is great, but it is without form, and inasmuch as form is our only truth, or noblest objective, in art and life, this piece fails. I know I failed. You almost always fail when you try for too much. You almost always succeed, if you are good anyway, when you don't try for enough. Critics are happiest with my stuff, I think, when I try for almost anything, when I sit down and quietly tell a story. I myself enjoy writing and reading a very simple story that is whole and with form."

He goes on to say that perhaps he is not old enough to be a great writer, but he is sure he is not yet old enough not to want to be a great writer, and states that he shall be miserable when he will no longer wish and need to try to do, in prose, with the word, that which would seem impossible to do. In spite of the fact that he knew the story to be a failure, it would not be like Saroyan to spend some of this excessive energy on the revision of it. "Baby" is nothing but a series of flashlight impressions of the American soil and the American people. It is pretentious and unconvincing. There are five pages tucked away in the middle of the story that deal with a boy delivering a telegram, notifying a mother that her son has just been killed. This is done with honest pathos and is whole and with form. It would make a magnificent story by itself carved away from the rest of the story.

The only one of the nine stories that is entirely successful is the first: "The Man with His Heart in the Highlands," the short story on which Mr. Saroyan's first play is based. It is about an old actor, a fugitive from the old people's home, who played a bugle solo in front of Mr. Saroyan's house and asked for a drink of water and stayed for two weeks until the people from the old folks' home needed him to play in their annual show. Johnny is the little boy, and his father is the greatest poet in the world, but he is unpublished, gets no money, and it is Johnny's task to get food from Mr. Rosah, the grocer, without money. But Mr. MacGregor, the actor, plays so well and so loud that many people gather about and finally bring him articles of food for a song.

> "Mr. MacGregor lifted the bugle to his lips and played "My Heart's in the Highland; my heart is not here," and each of the good neighbors and friends wept and returned to his home, and Mr. MacGregor took all the good things into the kitchen--"

Again, as in his earlier stories, success is a matter of simplicity and wholeness and form. This story is probably one of the best stories Saroyan has ever written. Its simplicity ranks with "The Broken Wheel" from Inhale and Exhale, and the other childhood memory stories that will be discussed later in Little Children and My Name Is Aram. Here, as indicated in the Introduction, is also a proof of Mr. Saroyan's romantic realism. Strangly combined with the simplicity of a boyhood memory story, it is quite different from anything else Mr. Saroyan has ever written, and might easily be called his best story.

The rest of the stories in this volume are worth very little. In most instances they are merely notes and impressions for stories Saroyan might have written. Sometimes these notes, like some of his earlier self-indulgences, are flippant and sometimes penetrating. In the preface he writes:

> "I am going to write an introductory note to each piece to let the reader in on some inside stuff. Readers who do not enjoy reading notes can read the stories and skip the notes, just as readers who do not enjoy reading stories can skip the stories and just read the notes. Readers who do not enjoy reading either notes or stories by William Saroyan can shift for themselves."

And for something more penetrating he writes:

> "Time is altogether an inexplicable and magnificent thing, and in so small a thing as a mere short story time can become so tremendous an intensification of experience that the reader, God bless him and keep his eyes unestigmatic, will have lived more richly, more greatly, more swiftly, more meaningfully and more magnificently than he could ever had had the wit or daring or madness to live in the light of day, in the world."

The second volume in this group, Love, Here is My Hat, was brought out by Modern Age in the spring of 1938. Mr. Saroyan has none of his childhood stories here. His impressionistic method as seen in the earlier volumes is still the same. Mr. Saroyan stares with great curiosity at everything in the world. He catches the whirl and glitter of events. He is bored and veers off on another track. He informs us that it was boredom, displeasure and anger toward life that started him writing while he was in the third grade in grammar school.

> "I wrote the same sort of thing I write today, a form of prose naturally combining the elements of the story, the essay, the poem, the declamation, prophecy, oratory, and a number of other things I invented."

As usual there are some stories that are clever, others that are merely exhibitionism. "You're Breaking My Heart" tells of a man who tries to discover from his chauffeur how to recapture his wife. This is one of the best. A close second is "The Genius," in which Mr. Saroyan is given a great movie idea to exploit. "A Family of Three" and "The La Salle Hotel" are above the average. Here we have more of Mr. Saroyan, as seen in the earlier volumes, a foot-loose, back-alley American taking snapshots of everything he sees.

The third of these inferior collections, called "Peace, It's Wonderful," was also brought out by Modern Age in the summer of 1938, a few months after Love, Here is My Hat. Here it is very obvious that Mr. Saroyan is just experimenting. He outwardly states in the preface that he is using the "jump in the river and start to swim immediately system of writing" and that he has devised a "whole new grammar and system of punctuation which perfectly fits the tempo and texture of alleged thought." The principle point made by all stories in this volume is that the author is impressionable. Handed on without form, without care for the surfaces, they reflect reactions that seem to Mr. Saroyan worth putting down but not worth slaving over. He is impressed in one instance by the warmth he felt at being one in the everlastingness of a permanent poker game and this serves him for a single piece of narrative and dialogue. He is impressed by the optimism of people who buy sixty automobiles and gaily drive off in them and he connects this in some way with the glory of the American dream. He is also impressed by the fact that insurance agents can be as tenacious in their quest for sales as artists are supposed to be in search for form. Mr. Saroyan is pioneering in a very difficult terrain here. He is experimenting with a style that at present hardly seems adequate.

In a story, "We Want a Touchdown,"[1] Mr. Saroyan begins by telling us that he is "by a margin, the noisiest" writer that broke into print. In this piece he outlines a novel around a very elaborate, effectively drawn metaphor. Here he speaks of the oval stadium, the "holiest of all shapes," with the people looking down upon the field, the symbol of the world. He

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[1] Trouble With Tigers

says here, "Sure, if I were to concentrate on the theme I could do something great."

In this statement Mr. Saroyan has offered a fair criticism of much of his writing. This is especially true in the three collections discussed in this chapter. In many cases if he had concentrated on the theme he had merely set down, he could have done something great. But instead he plunges on headlong, trying to get the right word said about everything as he rushes by, and believing that if you get that word said, everything is all right henceforth. He has tried to lunge at the human garden and grab the secrets of what grows there. Like other writers, he has felt the barrier erected by words between perception and report, and he has tried to tear through the greater immediacy. Therefore, he seldom takes time to construct a formal work, to tell an artistic story, or to follow rules. He makes one story by throwing in crude, jagged-edge fragments of life on the wing, and then writes another to justify and explain his procedure and express his contempt for form. Some of these pieces are carried solely by their troubled impetuosity, as he took seriously his own advice to a writer:

> "Try to learn to breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep, really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough." [1]

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[1] Preface to the First Edition, The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze

CHAPTER IV

THE TROUBLE WITH TIGERS

Brought out in November 1938 by Harcourt, Brace and Co., The Trouble With Tigers is another volume which seems to be made up mostly of impressionistic essays. But here is a volume that in both style and content is much superior to Three Times Three; Love, Here Is My Hat, and Peace, It's Wonderful.

As it was pointed out before, Mr. Saroyan is determined to let nothing escape him until he can note it down in words. His method is inhaling and exhaling and letting the words fall into any shape they please, even if the result is, as Mr. Saroyan admits, some of the worst prose ever written.[1] His style, therefore, is like breathing. Sometimes it comes out smooth and melodious, and sometimes in yells, in detached oaths and phrases from the street. But in this volume there is always something behind the arrangements of the words, even when his sentence structure is that which would drive a rhetorician mad. For example, in "Woof. Woof," and "The Tiger" in this volume, he uses an effective unconnected catalogue style that expresses the brutality and coldness that can compass life.

> "That's what money is. Forty-eight cents, forty-nine cents, woof woof, fifty cents, a cheap room in a decaying building on a main street, a hard bed containing eighty-five, eighty-six, woof woof, lice."

> "After April came May and after New Orleans, New York. Then June and the sea, Atlantic. Then Europe and the cities there, and I mean death, the tiger following each who lives, brother."

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[1] Preface to "Baby," Three Times Three

In Three Times Three, Love, Here Is My Hat, and Peace, It's Wonderful, Mr. Saroyan merely had an eager curiosity. These mercurial qualities made for superficiality and impressionism, and caught only the appearance of themes, merely took shapshots. But here in The Trouble With Tigers he has, as seen in "The Mother," "Secrets in Alexandria," "Hunger Laughing, "A Night of Nothing," and Panaroma Unmerciful,"[1] and indicated in the Introduction, a certain understanding, a certain nodding to the way poor humans try to cover up their heartaches and also a comprehension of the fact that they are always longing to do a difficult thing against great odds in a fine way. For example, in "The Job," he writes of the bond of sentiment that unites through desperation two jobless and wandering boys, and of their code which compels the one who found a job to give support to his friend, and the more imperative code of self-respect which sends the friend on his way with the farewell, "All the luck in the world, kid. You'll need it."

"O. K., Baby. This Is the World" carries along the same Saroyan philosophy:

> "The picture begins with this young doctor holding up a new born baby by its legs and slapping life into it. The young doctor says, 'O. K., baby. This is the world, so inhale and exhale, and be with us a while. They're not going to be kind to you out there because nobody was kind to them, but don't hate anybody. There's nobody to hate. You're going to be pushed around, and so forth and so on. That's the idea.' He tells the baby how it is and what to expect, and the story begins."

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[1] Inhale and Exhale

Though his stories tell of great desperation and failure, they manage to keep to Mr. Saroyan's large thesis that man has great dignity and that we should not imagine that he has not. Saroyan's love of all mandkind, his simple tolerance--racial, political and social--that results in a ridicule of the slogans of bigots and militant partisans, as revealed in the Introduction, is demonstrated by the following lines from "O. K. Baby. This Is the World," and "The People Yes, and Then Again No."

> ".....and Fascists are only people, too, so to hell with it. They think they're right and they're willing to die for whatever they believe, so what's the use being amazed at anything."

> "They wonder what comes over people to make them disagreeable and unfriendly, unkempt and ill-mannered, sullen, and brutish, stupid and vicious. Well, lack of food and sleep does wonders to the human body, and people inhabit bodies."

Again and again Mr. Saroyan scourges the viciousness of partisan thinking and race hatred. "In Citizens of the Third Grade" he tells of the effect of the Ethiopian war on the Negroes and Italian boys in a California school.

> "What did they want to invent guns for in the first place? What good did guns do the people of the world, except teach them to kill one another? First they worried about animals, the Indian--and then they began worrying about one another. France worrying about Germany; Germany worrying about France and England and Russia, and Russia worrying about Japan, and Japan worrying about China."

But Mr. Saroyan's pleas are not only for political, social, racial tolerance. In "Anything for a Laugh" he dramatizes effectively the pugnacity and braggadocio erected as a defense by a young, sensitive

Peruvian immured by his father's orders in an American school.

> "Alexander was eighteen, and miles from home, and his father was divorced from his mother, and each of them lived alone in a very big house, and Alexander lived alone.....I figured he was pretty broken hearted about everything and was driving out in the country so he could be alone."

As in all his volumes, the very best, there are few stories that merely vent Mr. Saroyan's great verve and wild humor. Here we have stories like "Memories of Paris" and "The Dale Carnegie Friend." As Mr. Saroyan says himself, there is something funny in everything he writes because there is something funny in everything. And yet, as the Introduction points out, Mr. Saroyan's humor has a difficulty for being characterized, for it is a compound of sorrow and bitterness, of satire and fantasy.

A good example of this is found in the homesick, sensitive youth of eighteen trying to cover up his real feelings and act like a worldly "toughie":

> "He got rid of his good clothes and melancholy expression, and developed a swagger..... He cultivated a dangerous glance, too. I guess he got the idea from some Hollywood actor, like George Raft..... He was very anxious to impress everybody and would do anything for a laugh."

As the Introduction suggests, we find here in Mr. Saroyan an awareness of humanity striving toward civilization. This awareness has made the author more sober than he was in volumes like Three Times Three; Love, Here Is My Hat, and Peace, It's Wonderful. Here, in The Trouble With Tigers, he is less inclined toward experimentation and exhibitionism. He is a little less sure of himself since he is depressed by the clamor that bigotry now raises throughout the world.

CHAPTER V

THE CHILDHOOD MEMORY STORIES

Supporting the stories in The Trouble With Tigers, also in the serious vein, and reaching Mr. Saroyan's highest peak in short story writing, are his stories about children and adolescence written with a passionate closeness to experience that is as near as we can hope to get in words to the thing itself. Although we have seen this Mr. Saroyan before when he told us how it was to sell papers on a street corner,[1] to cut school for a day to wander about the country for no reason that he could explain to a teacher,[2] and to lie in bed weeping for childhood's melancholy, far-off things,[3] in Little Children and My Name Is Aram, he is even more subdued and more effective in this same type of short story.

Little Children, published in the early fall of 1937 by Harcourt, Brace and Co., was at that time considered Mr. Saroyan's best work. The stories in this book cover everything from General Grant's world tour in 1877 to the corduroy pants of Mr. Saroyan's uncle. In these seventeen pieces, half of them devoted to episodes of childhood or adolescence, the author certainly proves he has great charm and skill when writing about the younger generation.

One of the best stories in this volume is "The Sunday Zeppelin." In utmost simplicity Mr. Saroyan tells us how three boys saved their

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[1] "The Wrold and The Theatre," Inhale and Exhale

[2] "Five Ripe Pears," Inhale and Exhale

[3] "The War," Inhale and Exhale

pennies by not dropping them in the Sunday school plate, to buy a "real" zeppelin for a dollar, and when it actually came it was a thing of crepe paper and cardboard. "The Messenger" represents the simplest kind of an experience, with great effectiveness. It tells how a boy neglected to bring a doctor to a dying woman because of some engrossing business along the roadside, and how he found out, years later, what happened to the woman. Of the relatively few stories, "Where I Come from People Are Polite" is one of the stories of adolescence in this volume that tells simply, without any moralizing or explanation in a wistful, humorous style, how a young man gives up his job in the office of a cemetery company so that an old lady may keep hers. Joe, the youth in the story, is a typical Saroyan character. Only a Saroyan character would be so idealistically impractical to pass up a doubling of his salary and an opportunity to fulfill his life's ambition of owning a motorcycle. Joe is warm and human, and like other Saroyan characters, as revealed in the Introduction, he knows that this is not the best of all possible worlds, and therefore hearts filled with tenderness, pity, and understanding of other people's troubles are capable of making crooked things straight.

> "I didn't go straight to the locker and hang up my hat and go to to my desk because I knew something was wrong and I figured it wouldn't be polite to just go and hang up my hat and sit at my desk and try not to understand what was wrong and why Mrs. Gilpley was putting on her hat and coat, and crying."

With great simplicity and without any Saroyan-esque solipsism, the author tells his story with a closeness to the experience that is as near as one can hope to get in words to the situation itself. There is a wistful

humor in Joe's impulsive chivalry, but as it was revealed in the Introduction, Mr. Saroyan's humor is a combination of sorrow and bitterness, of satire,and even sometimes fantasy. It would have been easy to allow an excess of sentimentality to mar this story. But in this story Mr. Saroyan is well restrained. His use of suggestion is deft and his subtle economy noteworthy, in this collection dealing with childhood and adolescence. These are the best, although stories such as "The Only Guy in Town" and "Many Miles Per Hour" run second in having some of the same merit.

Besides stories with the western town background dealing with some other boys including "my brother Krikor," the Yukoslav, and many Armenian immigrants, there are, as we have met before in "The Mother," "A Night of Nothing," and "Secrets in Alexandria,"[1] a few stories showing a rebellion against monotony and the great loneliness in which men live their lives. These bring from Mr. Saroyan his deepest notes of compassion. Here Mr. Saroyan's bitterness seems to be cut down and his indictment of society is now more forceful because he relies on suggestion. His indignation is more effective here than in the Inhale and Exhale stories of the same type, because he seems to evoke a response in the reader through the stories themselves, rather than through his own declamations. In only one story he intrudes himself.[2] He tells instead of shows; he does not let the story speak for itself.

In the fall of 1938 the Archtype Press, a small West Coast publishing house, issued a limited edition of four hundred and fifty copies of A Native American, which has reappeared,with a few stories added,this fall, by

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1 Inhale and Exhale

2 "The Man Who Got Fat "

Harcourt, Brace under a new title: My Name Is Aram. Here is a series of childhood memories, describing the imaginative life of an American boy, Aram Garoglanian, in Fresno, California. Christopher Morley calls him "a kind of immigrant Penrod,"[1] done with quiet strokes of grace and humor. In his preface to this volume, Mr. Saroyan tells us that these stories were written "without effort, strain, or any of the other kinds of wretchedness said to be experienced by writers." These innocent escapades show us a degree of ease and light-heartedness. We read with great delight and with some humility too, of "the proud and angry Saroyans,"[2] and their struggles with American civilization. In "The Journey to Hanford," the foolish Uncle Jorgi who is sent to Hanford by the family, Aram going with him, is happy when there is not any work in the melon fields. He and Aram sit in an empty house for a month, cooking rice and playing the zither. The grandfather-grandmother dialogue in the beginning of this story is magnificent. When the old lady talks too much, he says "The back of my hand is on the way to your mouth." In "The Pomegranate Trees" we get a good picture of Aram's Uncle Melik, the worst farmer who ever lived. He wanted only beauty, so he insisted on planting pomegranate trees on a sandy desert, at the foot of the Sierra Nevada, where they could not possibly grow.

> "It was all pure esthetics, not agriculture. My uncle liked the idea of planting trees and watching them grow..... It was a region of loneliness, emptiness, truth, and dignity. It was nature at its proudest, dryest, loneliest, and loveliest."

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[1] "My Name Is Aram," Christopher Morley Book of the Month Club News December 1940

[2] Preface by William Saroyan, My Name Is Aram

"The Fifty Yard Dash," is an amusingly delightful story of Aram at twelve, writing letters to a Mr. Strongfort in New York in answer to an advertisement offering to make him the most powerful man in the neighborhood. After much difficulty, he finally persuaded his uncle to give him three dollars so he might have Mr. Strongfort's secret. His uncle had been at this time visiting the Public Library's theosophy, philosophy, astrology shelves and practicing the Yoga method of relaxation. Finally Aram gets the secret formula from Mr. Strongfort and is greatly disappointed because it was just a few common sense health rules that he knew anyway. Practicing faithfully every morning in spite of his grandmother's humorous and shouting criticisms, Aram believes he cannot lose the Longfellow School's track meet. He ran, in his mind, faster than any human being ever ran before and he was last to come in, by ten yards.

> "It was incredible. It was unbelievable, but it was obviously the truth. There ought to be some mistake, but there wasn't. There they were, ahead of me, going away."

Aram and his pal, Joey Penna, cut school whenever the circus comes to town and get lickings from Mr. Dawson, the tired old principal who implores them to modulate their voices when they howl, in the funniest story in the group, "The Circus." After many offenses, they are to get thirty wallops from Mr. Dawson, enough to make them cry, but Mr. Dawson seems to understand young boys and makes the thirty light.

> "We wanted to thank him for giving us such easy strappings, but we couldn't say it. I think he knew the way we felt, though, because he smiled in a way that gave us an idea he knew."

The book ends with Aram on his way to New York City, a young man. He is in Salt Lake City when stopped by an old Mormon, dressed in overalls, who tells him in order to be saved he must believe in everything. The story is told in a modest, simple, insinuating way.

> "I thought I was kidding the padre of Salt Lake City, getting back my vast book-learning and anti-religious poise, but I was sadly mistaken, because unwittingly I had been saved. In less than ten minutes after the bus left Salt Lake City, I was believing everything, left and right, as the missionary had said, and it's been that way with me ever since." [1]

The first and last sentences seem to summarize the book's quality, showing Mr. Saroyan a genuine poet in prose and spokesman for the youth of the world.

> "One day back there in the good old days when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a mysterious dream....." [2]

> "I was believing everything left and right, as the missionary said, and it's been that way with me ever since." [1]

We see, in Little Children and My Name Is Aram, Mr. Saroyan at the highest point in his short story writing career. We notice that those insufferable moments of posing and expanding his ego and his annoying habit of brooding just for the sake of brooding, apparent in the earlier pieces, are gone. He has stripped from his work all his self-conscious

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[1] "A Word To Scoffers," My Name Is Aram

[2] "The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse," My Name Is Aram

posturing and prancing, and left clear to the eye the strong care of passionately remembered experience which has always been at the heart of his best work.

As indicated in the Introduction, Mr. Saroyan might be hampered by a cult of realism that seems to degrade so much of our fiction today. As we have demonstrated in Little Children and My Name Is Aram, he has gone back to his childhood where his sense of reality is certain. In this age of chaos and doubt, he has gone back to the security of his childhood memories.

> "One day back there in the good old days, when I was nine and the world was full of every imaginable kind of magnificence, and life was still a delightful and mysterious dream-----" [1]

These stories are remarkably effective, and accomplish their purpose with a high efficiency, giving us some unforgettable close-ups of that ungraceful age. Above all, they mark a unique personality in American writing that is an important influence in the short story field.

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[1] "The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse," My Name Is Aram

CHAPTER VI

MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS

In the year 1939-1940 Mr. William Saroyan brought to the scene of the American theatre a vitality, an originality and a force in three plays that not only moved and delighted audiences and critics but startled and bewildered them because they could not figure out what it was that did it.

The first of these plays, "My Heart's In the Highlands," which appeared first in short story form and later published in the One Act Play Magazine, is not a play which says a precise thing in a clear-cut manner. Its whole point and glory is that it does something to you, something poignant and exquisite and indefinable. The settings, an old white broken-down frame house, with a front porch, on San Benito Avenue in Fresno, and Mr. Kosak's grocery, are circumscribed by realism. The play is written in the everyday prose that goes well with a realistic scene, yet it is poetry in the larger sense that it represents truths in the simplest terms. As in the parables of Isaiah, the force lies in the fact that it is couched in everyday words about ordinary people, and the charm is that it can mean so many different things.

> "Come, let me sing about my friend, a love song about a vineyard. A vineyard had my friend on a richly fruitful height." [1]

The play deals with a starving poet, Ben Alexander, the world's most famous unpublished poet, and his son Johnny, a boy of nine, who live happily enough from hand to mouth with the poet's mother who is old and cannot speak a word of English. They are visited by a great, gray bearded old Shakespearean actor, a refugee from the old people's home who plays

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[1] Isaiah V. 1.

beguilingly on a silver bugle. The neighbors gather to hear the old man play and recite poetry. The old actor, Jasper MacGregor, is unhappy because his heart is in the highlands 5000 miles away. The poor and good neighbors bring him different articles of food in payment for his playing and reciting which bring tears to their eyes, move them to esthetic happiness. Then a young man from the old people's home comes to take Mr. MacGregor back for a part in the annual show. He had remained two weeks. The old actor again visits the poet's house. This time the poor unhappy man dies reciting the death speech from Shakespeare's "King Lear." Finally, Johnny's father, Johnny, and the old lady are forced to leave their home and take for the open road. They go with great dignity.

There are many beautiful and unforgettable moments in the long one-act play. One is the scene of the unsuccessful poet, after telling his son to leave him to himself, opens his letter from Atlantic Monthly, letting fall the rejected poems to the floor. He looks down at the headlines of a newspaper lying on the floor:

> "Do ahead, kill everybody. Declare war on one another. Take the people by and mangle them. Their poor hearts and their poor spirits and their poor bodies. Give them ugliness. Pollute their dreams. Horrify them. Distort them with hatred for one another. Befoul the legend of the living, you maniacs whose greatness is measured by the number you destroy. You frauds of the world. You wretched and ungodly. Go ahead. Fire your feeble guns. You won't kill anything. There will always be the poets in the world."

Another memorable scene is the one in which the old actor dies while his music is still quivering on the air, and his awe-struck neighbors watch his body being carried back to the Home for the Aged from which he

had fled. He recites jumbled lines from Shakespeare's "Hamlet," "Lear," and a few of his own that are "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!
Rage! Blow!
You cataracts and hurricane, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples,
drowned the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Singe my white head!
Rumble thy belly-full, spit fire, spout rain.
I never gave your kingdom, called you children.
Here I stand, your slave,
A poor, inform, weak and despised old man.
To be--- To be--- "

For some lighter humor the scene of the whistling boy and Johnny is charmingly done:

The Boy
"Do you want a paper? There's a war in Europe."
Johnny
"I haven't got any money. We ain't rich. We don't work. My father writes poetry."
The Boy
"Oh, that's all right. Don't you ever have any money?"
Johnny
"Sometimes. I found a quarter once. It was lying on the sidewalk, right in front of me. Once my father got a check for ten dollars from New York, too. We bought a chicken and a lot of stamps and paper and envelopes---"

The play is packed with a kind of symbolisn, double meanings, an undercurrent of meaning combined with fun and the wonder of life. For example, Johnny says at the end of the play when the three are on the way, "I'm not mentioning any names, Pa, but something's wrong somewhere. " No doubt Mr. Saroyan las led us among the gay dispossessed to tell us, without mentioning names, something is wrong with the world. He shows us in the

scene of the good and friendly neighbors and their love for the actor's music, how starved, yet constant, is mankind's love for beauty. He urges us to realize that the great people of the earth are not the big men whose greatness is measured by the numbers they have slain, but the little men who rise to greatness by the gallantry with which they meet their privations and sustain their dreams.

Mr. Saroyan has employed his double meanings successfully to combine and establish a mood and wake emotions, even if they defy comprehension or better yet, bring to us, in an understanding way, knowledge that we can understand.

As indicated in the Introduction, Mr. Saroyan demonstrates here his love for the human race, his philosophy that man has great dignity. He shows us in characters like Mr. Kosak, Johnny's father, the old actor, and the good friends and neighbors the essential goodness in life and people. The poet father goes away with great dignity, no apparent bitterness. He stops his boy from being bitter. This illustrates very well, as ~~revealed~~ explained in the Introduction, Saroyan's belief that hearts filled with tenderness and pity and kindness and understanding of other people's troubles is the only way to bring about right from wrong. We can see in this play that Mr. Saroyan is a poet of the little people. He sees beauty in their souls and lives. He writes with his heart, not his brain, and as introduced in the beginning of this thesis, there is a humbleness of approach which is disarming.

CHAPTER VII

THE TIME OF YOUR LIFE

Here is a simple study of really simple people. The play has little plot, but it has Mr. Saroyan's magical ability to create a mood which takes the place of a plot. The play deals with Joe, a rich philanthropist who acts as a sort of unity to the play as he sits in Nick's saloon on Pacific Street in San Francisco, and registers the study of life as he drinks champagne. Joe sends Tom, his admirer, disciple and friend, out to get jelly beans or water melon or toys (for Kitty when she cries). Kitty is a girl from the streets, a young woman with memories. According to Joe, toys are good for keeping people from crying. Joe listens to Krupp, a waterfront cop, who hates his job and is puzzled about his duty in the strike which involves his pal McCarthy, an intelligent and well read longshoreman. McCarthy remarks, "I'm a longshoreman, and an idealist. I'm a man with too much brawn to be an intellectual." Joe talks to a darky who came to wash dishes and remains to play the piano a la "boogie woogie" for Harry, a natural born tap dancer who wants to be a comedian but can never make anyone laugh at his comedy. Kit Carson is another person that Joe listens to. He is an old Indian fighter, the last of our American frontiersmen. Dudley is a man in love, who tries to get Elsie on the phone all through the play; at last he succeeds. She comes into the bar. Willie is a marble-game maniac. He plays the game all during the play unsuccessfully. Finally at the end of the play he wins and the American flag shoots up out of the machine and the music box plays "America."

Here is another play that preaches the goodness in life and people. Saroyan tells us here that policemen have hearts and street walkers have souls. It is interference, institutions, and authority that degrade humanity. It is Mr. Saroyan's belief that nearly everybody is either good or would like to be good if he had not been confused in a society full of problems too hard to solve. He believes that once the people have grasped this fact, the world will be found full of delightfully surprising things and all will be a great deal happier. This point of view is tried in literature, but it proves to be one of the most difficult things to say with convincing sincerity. Only a rare artist can proclaim that he loves people without seeming fatuous. And Mr. Saroyan does this with great exuberance. In this play Joe, the central figure, acts as a Mr. Fix-it, whose search is for happiness and an answer to the far-reaching enigmas of life. He manages to marry Kitty, the girl of the streets, off to his friend and amiable henchman, Tom. This saves Kitty from the odious detective of the vice squad. Even though there is no form, or following of dramaturgic principle, this play, as it was announced in the Introduction, has tremendous vigor and beauty which have predominated over its lack of form. Its compassion is as irresistible as its humor is gay, or as its insight is exceptional. Outstanding moments in the play are scenes, for example, when the policeman describes his hatred of his duties:

> "All I do is carry out orders. I don't know what the idea is behind the order, who it's for or who it's against, or why. All I do is carry it out."

And when Kitty is brought a mechanical toy, symbolic of what is wrong with the machinery of life:

> "Joe starts the carousel which makes a strange, sorrowful, tinkling music. The music begins slowly, becomes swift, gradually slows down, and ends."

Also, when the Arab, a character who only Mr. Saroyan could create, plays on his harmonica music revealing his race's sadness long ago, is another outstanding moment in the play.

Unity is brought to the play by Joe, who is the center of all action. The man at the slot machine,who throughout the entire play is trying to win and is in the last act successful, also brings a unity to the play. All there is to the plot is that it is a variation on the boy meets girl theme. Joe teaches a hopeless young woman and a jobless young man to respect and love eachother. Blick, the Vice inspector, who is trying to cause trouble for Kitty, is the only evil character in the play and when he is killed all that is evil in the play is done away with.

In this play Mr. Saroyan has succeeded in bringing to the American theatre "the freshest, most imaginatively audacious, and most genuine humorous talent that has tickled it in a round of many moons." [1]

For the year 1939 Mr. Saroyan's play "The Time of Your Life" won both the New York Drama Critic Circle Award and the Pulitizer Prize Award. This was the first time that a play received both awards for the same year.

The presentation of the Drama Critic Award was in this form:

> "To William Saroyan, whose 'The Time of Your Life' is an exhilarating demonstration of the fresh, original and imaginative

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[1] "Drama," George Jean Nathan, Newsweek, April 29, 1940

talent he has brought into our American theatre, for the provocation of the play's unconventionality, and for the depth of its honest joy."

Voting for Mr. Saroyan's play were:

Sidney Whipple of the New York Telegram

Stark Young of the New Republic

Brooks Atkinson of the New York Times

Joseph Wood Krutch of the Nation

Richard Watts, Jr. of the Herald Tribune

John Anderson of the Journal American

John Mason Brown of the Post

George Jean Nathan of Newsweek

Grenville Vernon of The Commonweal

John W. Gassner of One Act Play Magazine

Mr. Saroyan won by a vote of eleven to seven. The seven divided among three other plays, four votes going to Robert E. Sherwood's "There Shall Be No Night." Those voting for Mr. Sherwood's play were:

Burns Mantle of Daily News

Walter Winchell of The Mirror

Kelcy Allen of Women's Wear

Rosamond Gilder of Theatre Arts

Richard Lockridge of the Sun voted for Maxwell Anderson's "Key Largo." So did Robert Rice of Morning Telegram. Louis Kronenberger of Time favored "The Man Who Came to Dinner," and Robert Benchley of the New Yorker did not vote.

As revealed in the Introduction, toward the human race Mr. Saroyan has the best intentions:

> Joe to Kitty (gently but severely),
> "It is not my nature to be unkind to another human being. I have only contempt for wit. Otherwise I might say something obvious, therefore cruel, and perhaps untrue. I have the noblest thought for both your person and your spirit."

The play is poetic, far more so than many of the blank verse dramas that help give poetic drama a "black eye." Mr. Saroyan has created a plentiful life that pours up constantly. The mind behind the play is rich with curiosity, music, variety, an instinct for human color, a patter of human words, a passion, almost gay, for half-tragic human experience. Mr. Saroyan uses the stage for an incarnation and makes an affirmation about life that he does not specifically declare.

CHAPTER VIII

LOVE'S OLD SWEET SONG

"Love's Old Sweet Song", like"My Heart's In the Highlands," and "The Time of Your Life," has originality, freshness, vigor, and is filled with the Saroyan-esque imaginative fancy. But in this play these virtues put in their appearance as though they were misinformed as to the time of their importance to the rest of the play, and each one disappears before the next can make an entrance. There are never enough of them on hand to make this play the equal of the other two plays.

Here is a fool of an old maid, Ann Hamilton, forty-four years old, who lives alone in a little old fashioned house with a front porch, on Orchard Avenue, in Bakersfield, California. Ann Hamilton is led to believe by a messenger boy for Postal Telegraph, Georgie Americanos, that a traveling patent medicine salesman, Barnaby Gaul, is the man that was the boy who filled her dreams of love back in the days when she was sixteen. Though Barnaby is a fraud, the trust and faith of Ann gradually convert him into that boy she dreams of. But before this finally comes about, Barnaby is just taking advantage of a good thing and is rocking under the roses quite peacably. This is before the advent of the Yearlings--Cabot, Leona and their fourteen children, who range from a nineteen year old half-witted son to a tiny red headed tot. The advent of the Yearlings and their children, plus Richard Oliver, an unpublished writer who is writing a novel about them and Elsa Wax, a photographer for Life Magazine, is fabulous. Their multitudinous entrance drove Barnaby out. But by thistime Ann is so captivated by him, she follows him. The migrators have decided they have found

a pleasant oasis and Mrs. Yearling is going to have her fifteenth baby. They settle down and make themselves comfortable with Ann's clothes and house, turning everything upside down. The deus ex-machina, here is a Greek Wrestler, who is full of kindness for all, and at whose home all difficulties are straightened. Twelve of the fourteen children of the Yearlings and Barnaby organize a singing medicine show, and all ends happily.

There is not any sentimentalism in the play. It has inventive humor. Some episodes are extremely hilarious. The best is the scene in which a salesman of Time Magazine is idiotically trying to persuade a completely destitute and illiterate "okie" like Mrs. Yearling to subscribe. He seriously and triumphantly recites to her the thirty or forty names of Time's editors, assistant editors, and associate assistant editors. He compounds such a rhythmic litany that Mrs. Yearling rocking on the porch, rocks the names admiringly on her tongue, and every now and then bids that the prettier ones be repeated for her. Finally the salesman procures the "X" signature of Mrs. Yearling's illiterate husband.

Windmore (The Time Magazine salesman)
"Ellen May Ash, Sheila Baker, Sonia Bigman, Elizabeth Budelman, Marie de Blasis, Hannah Durand, Jean Ford, Dorothy Lorrell------"

Mrs. Yearing
"No more names?"

Windmore
"No, that just about winds up the editorial department."

Mrs. Yearling
"What were some of those nice names again?"

Windmore
"Duncan Norton-Taylor, Williston C. Rich, Jr."

Another hilarious scene is when the okie, who spends all his days lying flat on the lawn and when ~~he is~~ not scratching himself, ~~he~~ is sleeping, suddenly sits up and launches into a long tirade, blaming all the ills of the world on the influence of the moving picture.

> "They was always the nicest children I ever knew. Sweet and thoughtful and courteous. Now they're women. It's moving pictures! Clark Gable and all them different men coming into their lives. You can't hardly blame children. They don't know there ain't people like that. It's moving pictures, making promises they can't keep. I'll be losing them girls soon. I can see it in their eyes. No matter what a man does, it just seems like he's always going to lose something. It scares a man. Gives him a lonely feeling."

Another scene, where the innumerable okie children invade the old maid's house during her absence and take proud possession of everything from her dresses to her cosmetics, is extremely extravagant.

> "The twins come out of the house, each in one of Ann's dresses, each wearing high-heeled shoes, each powdered and rouged."

Velma
"Look, Ma. We bathed, too."

Leona (Mrs. Yearling)
"Hear that, Cabot? They bathed, too."

Selma
"Look, Pa. Look at me!"

On the side of sentiment, also streaked with humor, is the scene between the Greek Wrestler "papa" of the little messenger boy and the the boy's grandfather. This is conducted in Greek and broken English.

"The two men smoke in silence a moment and then begin to speak, the father in Greek, the son in broken English."

Pericles (the grandfather)
"Acaahhk, aaaahkh."

Stylianos
"Don't worry, Papa. Everything's going to be satisfactory."

Also, the scene in which Barnaby enters into a lofty serio-comic soliloquy on love that lasts for a full fifteen lines is both gentle and funny.

"Dear lady, you shame me. Your poetic words pierce me like arrows. I am sweetly wounded by your devotion! It would be the lowest of the low to leave you here in the garden of disorder except, except, I repeat, that there are things stronger even than love, if you can only discover them..... The lies I tell are never for the purpose of hurting others. There is murder in such lies. In mine there is birth. I say only what others wish me to say. I have said what you have wished to hear. Gentle deceit is best for the moment, but for the year, truth is best-------"

Saroyan has created amusement in numerous other scenes and bits also. For example, in the figure of the Greek with a passion for mowing lawns, whether they need it or not, so great that he takes out American citizenship papers so he may mow the lawn, and in the sudden rebirth of love of Barnaby for his wife when she appears in a dress she has stolen from Ann's wardrobe and boasts that she has taken a bath.

These scenes are proof of Mr. Saroyan's great imagination compounded with good hearted and innocent fun. Here Mr. Saroyan has spun some more of his beguiling improvisations for three acts. These improvisations are comic, as pointed out, and his attitude toward life is wholly ingratiating. His

writing is warming. As the Introduction points out, toward human beings he has the best intentions. Toward Ann, the old maid, he might have been satirical if his mind worked in a formula, but he gathers her up in his great fund of friendliness. His attitude toward the okies is generous and understanding. As the Introduction says, and the other two plays demonstrate, he is still in this play a poet of the little people and sees beauty in their souls and lives. But this play as a whole lacks in many places the spontaneity which characterized the other two plays.[1] By comparison it seems deliberately trumped up in spots, as though Mr. Saroyan for the first time was doing what he thought was expected of him. Many incidents are devoid of that air of poetic fantasy that give its quality to "The Time of Your Life." It holds jokes until they have lost their humor. The play in places grows tiresome and thin. Its stillness, redeemed by no point, and its confusions have no real beauty behind them. One can hardly claim strict unity as a virtue of Mr. Saroyan's plays, but "The Time of Your Life" and "My Heart's in the Highlands" do exhibit some unity of tone and do move with recognizable rhythm, which gives a continuity to incidents logically disconnected. Neither of these qualities is very apparent in "Love's Old Sweet Song," where the movement is irregular and the sequence of events seems merely random.

This demonstrates and proves, ~~as revealed in the Introduction~~, that the absence of form, lack of the dramaturgic principle can, although it does not in "My Heart's In the Highlands" and "The Time of Your Life,"

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[1] "My Heart's in the Highlands"

[1] "The Time of Your Life"

invalidate Mr. Saroyan's plays. He can turn loose the full current of his fantasy, imagination, riotous tumult, laughter, and loving double-edged folk observations, as he did in this play with the okies, Ann, and the Greeks, and lose it all in a full stream because it was not great enough to overpower irregulation and lack of form.

CHAPTER IX

RECENT UNPUBLISHED PLAYS

During the past year, Mr. Saroyan has busied himself with ideas for five plays. Mr. George Jean Nathan, drama critic, has read the scripts of four of the plays, yet in an unfinished state.[1] Although they reveal Mr. Saroyan's virtues of vitality and vigor, and great inaginative fantasy, their chief defect is their woeful lack of organization.[1] They give the impression, as they now stand, of something quickly done under momentary inspiration. They should not be tossed out of their nests before they are ready to fly. If Mr. Saroyan will work over them, put them into form, organize them according to dramaturgic principles, without losing their vigor, spontaneity, and sparkle, he will have great drama.

The first of these plays is "Sweeney in the Trees." This is a story of a lonely young man who gathers about him a wondrous riff-raff of humanity and proves to them that money is meaningless. In this play Saroyan exposes some of his jaunty humor, and surely several moments of imaginative dramatic writing.

The second of these plays is called "The Hero of the World". This is a dramatic helter-skelter purporting to depict Saroyan's conception of the average man in conflict with his surroundings. The play is made up of manifold shifting of episodes played on a bare stage. It is Mr. Saroyan's idea that a bare stage is enough in its own possible illusion, It can represent anything to the imagination. This idea is centuries old, goes back to the beginnings of the drama.

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[1] "Whirling Dervish," Saroyan, American Mercury, George Jean Nathan, November 1940

"Something About a Soldier" is the third play. Its central characters are a bewhiskered old man, seventy years old, and his small adopted son. The old man is obviously patterned after George Bernard Shaw.[1] They live in a little American town. The small boy discourses volubly on dictators and warfare, and by way of trying to convince others of the soundness of his philosophies, he whimsically digs a trench in his front yard, gets into it with the little boy, and declares war on the rest of the world. The basic scheme of the farcical satire is excellent. If impatient writing and absence of careful dramatic planning do not spoil it when it is ready for the theatre, it will no doubt prove to be great drama.

"Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning," the fourth play, is shorter than the others. It is about the length of "My Heart's in the Highlands." The scene is a bar restaurant on East 52nd Street, New York, The characters include everything from bartenders, waiters, and elderly Wall Street brokers to Union picketers, Filipino dishwashers, and one described as "Rhinelander 2-3182," a mother, and a new born baby.

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[1] "Whirling Dervish," Saroyan, American Mercury, George Jean Nathan, November 1940

THE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE

Mr. Saroyan has labored all winter shaping his fifth play, "The Beautiful People," for a Broadway presentation. The play was originally called "A Cup of Kindness."[1] Again Mr. Saroyan has written paeans to the essential goodness in life and people.

"The Beautiful People," in its simple study of really simple people shows Mr. Saroyan's large and generous affection. Through this affection he seems to warm whatever aspect of humanity he touches. Like the other plays, "The Beautiful People" has its disunities and also like the others, it is saved by its permeating quality of being individualized with a variegated assortment of fascinating characters, its poignant beauty, high quality of imagination and ever warming tenderness that predominates over all else and raises the play above the need of a conventional plot and action scheme.

The play concerns Jonah Webster, the father of Owen, fifteen, and Agnes, eighteen. The three are living as squatters in a house that is falling to pieces around them. They pay no rent and they do no work. They subsist on the proceeds of a monthly check, mailed to them by mistake by an insurance company and intended for a beneficiary who has been dead for years.[1] Agnes and Owen have a passionate interest in the mice with which the house is infested. Owen is a poet and scientist who writes books of one word. He sustains a humorous fantasy by way of attitude toward the mice to which Agnes has always been kind. He arranges the flowers on the floor to spell "Agnes," and tells his sister that the mice have done it. When one of the

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[1] "Whirling Dervish of Fresno," Saroyan, George Jean Nathan, American Mercury, November 1940

[2] "The Beautiful People," Elizabeth Jordan, America, May 10, 1941

mice is lost, Owen goes to find it.[1] Mr. Saroyan's imaginative fantasy, originality, simplicity and brightness that seem to fleck his prose with poetry are well demonstrated by this part of "The Beautiful People."

There are other characters in the play, however. A fine old priest visits the Websters; a hard drinking delivery man stops in a while. Miss Harmony Blueblossom, once a sweetheart of Jonah, now an aged spinster, visits the rusty Webster living room to talk about why people and the universe are beautiful.[2] Finally the vice president of the insurance company which is confidingly sending the monthly check to the family, comes in. This remarkable vice president is so enchanted by the charm of the three squatters that he increases the size of the check by ten dollars a month, and leaves them glowing under his benevolent blessing.

Mr. Saroyan's characters are warm and human. They know they are incapable of making crooked things straight except through kindness and understanding of other people's troubles. Before the end of the play, Harold Webster, the prodigal son, returns with his bugle which is heard faintly off-stage, an effective device used in "My Heart's in the Highlands."

"The Beautiful People" is a refreshing and enjoyable play that stresses Mr. Saroyan's central thesis that life is enjoyable and that society at its best is good comradeship. As usual, Mr. Saroyan's approach is emotional, rather than intellectual. The play has a gift for fantasy well worth esteeming. Mr. Saroyan's cup is overflowing with kindness and

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[1] "The Beautiful People," John Beaufort, Christian Science Monitor, April 22, 1941

[2] "The Beautiful Saroyan People," Brooks Atkinson, New York Times, May 4, 1941

it contains some refreshing nourishment in that he requests that people treat one another in a simple, wholesome way. Mr. Saroyan is here no more than a particularly volatile human being.

Just as Uncle Melik tried to bring life and beauty to a region of loneliness and emptiness,[1] so Mr. Saroyan has brought and will continue to bring vitality and freshness to the arid soil of our American drama.

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[1] "The Pomegranate Trees," My Name Is Aram

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

Having had eight volumes of short stories appear upon the literary scene since 1936, and four plays presented on Broadway since 1939, Mr. William Saroyan has made himself the most widely talked about young writer of our day.

In his first volume of short stories, The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze, that appeared in 1934, Mr. Saroyan reveals his genuine gift for writing and his genuine feeling for life. In the story called "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze," he tells with great poignancy and understanding of the dreams and sufferings of the impoverished young people of the 1930's. He furthers this understanding in stories called "Aspirin Is a Member of the N. R. A." and "1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8," where he demonstrates his knowledge of what it is like to go without money for the bare necessities of life. Mr. Saroyan has his own way of looking at things and saying things. He is little indebted to others for his ideas. "Myself Upon the Earth," "Seventy Thousand Assyrians," and "A Cold Day" are autobiographical revealing pieces in which Mr. Saroyan declares, no less lyrically for their being written in the language of the streets, his love for the human race and his desire to write about Man.

In the second volume, Inhale and Exhale, Mr. Saroyan is rich and suggestive in his many stories dealing with boyhood reminiscences. "Five Ripe Pears," "The War," "Death of Children," "The Barber Whose Uncle Had His Head Bitten Off by a Circus Tiger," and "The Broken Wheel" are simple stories drawn out of Mr. Saroyan's childhood memories and impressions without the last effort or strain. In every way these innocent and

guileful stories show that happy feeling of fresh lightness and ease. A very commonly recurring theme in this volume, as seen in the stories, "Raisins," "The Oranges," and "Prelude to an American Symphony," is its attack on the moral concepts resulting from ownership of property. This demonstrates very well Mr. Saroyan's hatred for those whose lives are ruled by their possessions. Dealing with the terrified desire of lost souls to find themselves and something fine in life, "Two Days Wasted in Kansas City," "The Horses and the Sea," "Little Miss Universe," demonstrate well Mr. Saroyan's love of human beings and his great optimism and faith in their innate goodness, and illustrate a romantic romanticism that is used for something fine and artistically important. "Secrets in Alexandria," "The Mother," and "Hunger Laughing" are concerned with the groping attempts of lonely souls to find solace in love. Here Mr. Saroyan has combined with the vitality of real life a greater sense of balance and intellectual form than is found in many of the autobiographical Whitman-esque pieces.

It is a critical weakness of Mr. Saroyan to reprint his lesser, trivial self-indulgences. A result of this weakness is three volumes of inferior short stories: Three Times Three, Love, Here Is My Hat, and Peace, It's Wonderful. The impressionistic pieces in these short volumes are very obviously experimentation. Mr. Saroyan has devised here a whole new system of grammar and punctuation which fits the tempo and texture of alleged thought. But he is pioneering in a difficult terrain, experimenting with a style that, as it is here, hardly seems adequate. Only one story in these volumes can be called wholely successful. This is in the volume Three Times Three, "The Man With His Heart in the Highlands," the

story on which Mr. Saroyan's first play is based. His success here is a matter of simplicity and wholeness and form that ranks with his childhood memory stories.

The Trouble With Tigers is a volume of impressionistic pieces that is much superior in both style and content to Three Times Three, Love, Here Is My Heart, and Peace, It's Wonderful. The stories in this volume called "The Job," "O. K., Baby. This Is the World," "The People Yes and Then Again No," indicate Mr. Saroyan's understanding of the way poor humans try to shield their heartaches and also indicate his comprehension of the fact that they are always longing to do a difficult thing against great odds, in a fine way. "Citizens of the Third Grade" scourges Mr. Saroyan's viciousness of partisan thinking and race hatred; and "Anything for a Laugh," "Memories of Paris," and "The Dale Carnegie Friend" illustrate Mr. Saroyan's idea that there is something funny in everything. Yet this humor is difficult to characterize for it is a combination of sorrow and bitterness and satire and fantasy.

Mr. Saroyan reaches his highest peak in his art of short story writing in the childhood memory stories, especially those found in Little Children and My Name Is Aram. "The Sunday Zeppelin," from Little Children, and "Journey to Hanford," "The Fifty Yard Dash," "The Circus," and "The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse" from My Name Is Aram are a series of childhood memories describing the life of an Armenian-American boy in a style of utmost simplicity that is almost Biblical. Mr. Saroyan has gone back to his childhood where his sense of reality is certain. He has gone back to the security of his childhood. "The Messenger" and

"Where I Come From People Are Polite," short stories from Little Children, are good examples of his "adolescence" stories in this volume. They tell simply, without moralizing, in a wistfully humorous style and with great effectiveness, the experiences of young manhood--no doubt Saroyan's young manhood. He tells these stories with a closeness to the experience that is as near as one can hope to get in words to the thing itself.

In the year 1939-1940, Mr. Saroyan brought to the scene of the American Drama a vitality, an originality and a force in three plays that have not only moved and delighted but at the same time bewildered audiences because they could not understand why. With a humbleness of approach which is disarming, "My Heart's In the Highlands," Mr. Saroyan's first play, illustrates the author's philosophy that hearts filled with tenderness, pity, kindness and understanding of other people's troubles are the only way to bring about right from wrong. "The Time of Your Life," Pulitzer Price Play of the year 1939-1940, in its tremendous vigor and beauty that overpowers and predominates its lack of form and lack of dramaturgic principle, preaches the goodness of life and people. Mr. Saroyan declares in this play that nearly everyone is either good or would like to be good if he had not been confused in a society full of problems too hard to solve. Although "Love's Old Sweet Song" lacks the spontaneity, the air of poetic fantasy, and simple poignant charm of the other two plays, it illustrates well that Mr. Saroyan is a poet of the little people and sees beauty in their souls and lives. In this play, absence of form and lack of dramaturgic principle has invalidated the author's art.

During the past year, five new plays have kept Mr. Saroyan's creative powers at work. Four of these, "Sweeney in the Trees," "The Hero of the World," "Something About a Soldier," and "Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning" are yet unfinished products. Although they reveal the author's virtues of vitality, vigor and great imaginative fantasy, their chief defects, as they now stand, are their woeful lack of organization. The fifth play, "The Beautiful People," is a simple study of really simple people, showing Mr. Saroyan's large and generous affection. The characters are warm and human. They understand that crooked things can be made straight only through kindness and tne sympathetic understanding of each other's troubles.

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